

STATEMENT OF PAUL HOFFMAN, DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY, FISH WILDLIFE AND PARKS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 2046, TO AUTHORIZE THE EXCHANGE OF CERTAIN LAND IN EVERGLADES NATIONAL PARK.

APRIL 27, 2004

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 2046. This bill would authorize a land exchange at Everglades National Park for the purpose of implementing an important restoration project that will benefit park habitat and resources.

The Department strongly supports an exchange of land between the South Florida Water Management District (District) and Everglades National Park (Park), as proposed in S. 2046, with amendments that are attached to this testimony. We have worked closely with the Department of the Army and the State of Florida on the proposed amendments related to the exchange so that it clearly states the purposes of the exchange and ensures that other administrative actions will be completed to effectuate the exchange contemplated by S. 2046. We understand that the State of Florida has expressed its support for the exchange.

S. 2046 directs the Secretary of the Interior (Secretary) to exchange approximately 1,054 acres of land from the Rocky Glades area of the park for approximately 1,054 acres of District land located in the Southern Glades Wildlife and Environmental Area. The park lands that are exchanged would be used for the C-111 project that is intended, among

other things, to restore park habitat that has been adversely affected by the Central and Southern Florida Project, as well as restore more natural flows of water to the park's eastern panhandle, and Taylor Slough, as well as Florida Bay.

The parcels proposed for exchange have been studied and found to be similar. There has, however, been no formal appraisal of the two parcels. Additionally, the NPS does not expect to incur increased operational costs associated with the exchange because of the restricted access to the area adjoining the lands the park would acquire and because the park's current operational responsibilities for lands that the park would be giving up would essentially be transferred to the proposed new additions.

Everglades National Park is one of the most unique ecological reserves in the nation and is unlike any other national park in the world. It is also, unfortunately, one of the most threatened of our national parks. Conditions arising in the south Florida region which threaten this park are well known to this Subcommittee and are the subject of several projects authorized by the Congress to attempt to restore aspects of the original physical and biological features of the historic Everglades.

For example, in the Water Resources Development Act of 1996, Congress authorized modifications to one project, the C-111 Project, to address restoration along the park's eastern boundary. As set forth in the May 1994 Final Integrated General Reevaluation Report and Environmental Impact Statement for the C-111 Project, features will be constructed that will limit water losses from the park through ground water seepage and

restore more natural water flows and levels through Taylor Slough, the eastern panhandle area of the park, and into northeastern Florida Bay.

While maintaining the authorized level of flood protection for agricultural activities adjacent to the park and within the C-111 basin, project features include the construction of four pump stations in the L-31N and C-111 canals and a series of retention areas just east of the park boundary to prevent the loss of water from the park through seepage.

In addition, a fifth pump station and distribution canal is specified in order to direct water into the Eastern Panhandle region and restore more natural flows through Taylor Slough to Florida Bay. The flow capacity in Taylor Slough would be increased through construction of two new bridges, spoil mounds south of the C-111 canal would be removed, and the C-109 and C-110 canals and levees would be removed. Funding has been provided by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) and State of Florida, with some additional amounts for land acquisition from the Department of the Interior.

The NPS, working with the COE and the District, evaluated the modifications as described above to the C-111 project and determined that land previously included within Everglades National Park would be needed for construction and completion of the project. S. 2046 would allow NPS, through an exchange, to provide the necessary lands to complete the project modifications and obtain an equal amount of acreage from the District, adjacent to the park boundary, which when incorporated into the park, would conform to the NPS's goal of no net loss to the park.

NPS evaluated five exchange alternatives in order to determine the maximum net gain in resource values for lands to be acquired. In consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the NPS established resource based criteria and evaluated the exchange alternatives as a part of the *Final Integrated General Reevaluation Report Supplement and Environmental Assessment*, completed in January 2002. The study's selected alternative proposed an exchange of lands as specified in S. 2046, which would result in an equal acreage exchange but an overall increase in resource benefits provided to the park.

Although the necessary exchange has not yet been completed, to date the project has accomplished the following important restoration goals. Three of the five pump stations and portions of related detention areas have been completed, the C-109 levee and canal and spoil mounds in the lower C-111 have been removed, two new bridges in Taylor Slough along the park road have been completed, and the District has purchased most of the land required for the project. Operations of the final project features for the C-111 Project will be assessed in the Combined Structural and Operational Plan (CSOP) for both the C-111 and Modified Water Deliveries Project. Work on developing this plan is ongoing and is scheduled for completion by the COE in June 2006.

Fundamentally however, S. 2046 is needed so that work may proceed as planned.

Although we strongly support the exchange, we suggest three amendments to S. 2046. The first would clarify the use of the federal land conveyed to the District. It clarifies

that the lands to be provided by the park under the exchange are for the purpose of implementing the project as previously planned and authorized by Congress.

The second would direct the completion of additional federal administrative actions that are necessary to complete the exchange. In brief, it directs completion of a smaller land exchange between Miami-Dade County, the U.S. Navy, and the NPS in order to acquire into federal ownership 153 acres within the 1,054 acres of park land to be exchanged under S. 2046. We had been examining options for completing this exchange administratively. We believe this exchange should be included in this bill since this exchange must occur before the exchange envisioned in the bill can take place. All parties, however, support the exchange, and believe the values are similar.

The third amendment would authorize the Secretary to acquire no more than 10 acres outside the park boundary, from willing sellers, in the vicinity of the East Everglades portion of the park for administrative, housing, maintenance and other park uses.

That completes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or any members of the Subcommittee may have.

Proposed Amendments

S. 2046 – Land Exchange in Everglades National Park

Page 3, line 3, strike “compatible with” and insert “for”.

Page 2, line 22, add the following at end of the first sentence:

“Prior to the Secretary’s conveyance of fee title to the Federal land to the District, the Administrator of the General Services Administration shall exchange, as expeditiously as possible, approximately 595.28 acres of land declared excess by the Department of the Navy, known as ‘Site Alpha,’ for two parcels of land, known as ‘Tract 605-01’ and ‘Tract 605-03’ and totaling approximately 152.93 acres, owned by Miami-Dade County. Upon completion of the exchange, the Administrator of the General Services Administration shall transfer administrative jurisdiction for Tract 605-01 and Tract 605-03 to the Secretary without reimbursement.”

Page 3, line 10, add a new section:

“SEC. 2. ADMINISTRATIVE SITE.—Section 102 of the Everglades National Park Protection and Expansion Act of 1989 (16 U.S.C. 410r-6) is amended:

(a) by inserting “(1)” before the first sentence in subsection (a), and

(b) by adding the following new paragraph:

(2) The Secretary may acquire up to 10 acres from willing sellers outside the park boundary, but adjacent to or in the general proximity of the East Everglades area of the park, for the development of administrative, housing, maintenance or other park purposes. Upon acquisition, the land shall be administered as part of Everglades National Park in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.”